

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -
Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad
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Continued Engagement with Baghdad Zoo – On June 26, USDA’s Dr. Jessica McCoy organized a veterinary visit to the Baghdad zoo. The visit was led by Lt. Col. Rick Torgerson. “Doc” Torgerson is a zoo veterinarian, former zoo director, and the Deputy Team Leader at PRT Muthana. The United States has invested heavily to refurbish the zoo and even donated tigers in 2007. One part of this visit included reviewing the treatment of a sick tiger cub. Dr. McCoy, who visited the zoo in 2007, noted they have made great strides in recent years. Throughout the violence, the zoo has been a family destination for Baghdad residents. USDA hopes to make the zoo veterinary check up a regular affair.



PM’s Office Stepping In To Fix Feed Import Barriers – USDA provided technical expertise to a large inter-agency meeting organized by the Prime Minister’s office. The June 23 meeting was called to address administrative impediments to feed imports that prevent vessel-sized shipments. The ministries of Agriculture, Trade, Industries, and Transportation were represented and the meeting was chaired by Former Oil Minister and Chief Committee Advisor Dr. Thamir Ghadhban. This meeting follows a March USDA port assessment of Umm Qasr concerning feed imports and, more recently, an educational visit to the Jordanian port of Aqaba led by AgCounselor Ron Verdonk. A clearly positive outcome of the meeting is that Dr. Ghadhban is drafting a memo to the Prime Minister suggesting specific policy reforms that should make it easier for commercial vessels carrying soybean meal and corn to be tested and offload at Iraq ports. Poor feed availability contributes to low per capita protein consumption, high meat prices, and unmet farmer and consumer expectations. Iraq could quickly become a million ton market for corn and soybean meal if the administrative impediments are addressed.

USDA Cooperates With Foreign Missions – USDA/Baghdad recently met with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) representatives to share information on assistance to Iraq’s agricultural sector. Among other activities, Japan is placing an agricultural expert in Iraq’s northern Kurdistan region, an area not currently covered by USDA Agricultural Advisors. On the commercial front, USDA is working with the French Embassy in Baghdad on visa assistance for Iraqi participants to the SIAL food trade show in Paris this fall. Over 100 U.S. food companies will exhibit at SIAL. In what has proven to be a very successful model, USDA/Baghdad will assist with visas, provide interpretation, and arrange meetings with U.S. suppliers in advance of a commercial show. The Iraqi firms pay for all of their own expenses.

USDA to sponsor Pathology Training – USDA/Baghdad, in conjunction with University of Georgia, the Borlaug Fellowship program, and the Iraq Veterinary Medical Syndicate, will be training 36 private and government veterinarians next week. The veterinarians are from every province in Iraq. The week-long course will cover necropsy techniques and field-expedient diagnostic methodology.

Personnel Update- There are currently 33 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, or embedded with U.S. military units. USDA welcomes the arrival of Patrick Broyles as the new Baghdad-based Soil & Water Advisor.

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